

ABBOT EASTER LETTER

April 2020

Dear Brothers and Sisters of the Way,

Last fall, Elsie Louise and I moved into Homewood at Plum Creek in Hanover, PA., a retirement home historically associated with the UCC.

For the last three weeks, due to the global coronavirus COVID-19, our Homewood Campus has been in lock-down mode. Our world is going through a very frightening and uncertain time!

As we read the gospel reading for Easter Sunday, John 20:1-18, the disciples and followers of their Lord are also frightened and fearful. You know the story. The disciples had so hoped that their Teacher had been the one, the Messiah who would be their next liberator, delivering the Jewish this time from bondage under the heel of the Roman Empire. But, Jesus had been crucified, suffering an agonizing and painful death. His body had been taken off the cross and placed in a tomb. The triumphal entry that had begun the week had been turned on its head. Those who had followed Jesus were in hiding, defeated, and surrounded by darkness and fear.

It was very early on the first day of the week when Mary Magdalene made her way to the tomb. What she noticed was mystifying. The stone that covered the entrance to the tomb had been rolled away. She didn't linger there. She ran to Peter and the other disciple, John. She told them that the tomb was empty. Those disciples run to the tomb. It is a good thing that their stomachs were empty. John arrived first. He stands outside, trying to take it all in. Then, Peter catches up, and he went into the tomb.

The linen wrappings that had been used to wrap Jesus' body were lying there. And, the cloth that had been on their Master's head was not with the linen wrappings, but was rolled up and by itself. So unusual. Care had been taken with the cloths. If the body had been stolen, signs of haste would have been apparent, wouldn't you think?

Then John entered the tomb. He saw and he believed. A huge leap of faith for not yet understanding the scriptures. Then the disciples went back to their homes.

Exactly when Mary returned, we don't know. Did she see the disciples leave? Did the disciples see Mary return to the tomb? What we know is that she is outside the tomb weeping. Even with the tears, she sees two angels clothed in white sitting where the body of Jesus had been lying, one at the head and one at the feet. When did they appear? They weren't there moments before.

The angels ask, "Why are you crying?" Mary asked if they had taken away her Lord, where was his body? Her heart is aching with loss.

At some point Mary turns around and she notices a person standing there. It is Jesus, but Mary doesn't recognize him. She thought that he was probably the gardener. She inquired if he knew where the body was lying. She would take care of the body.

You and I know that the grandest surprise of all surprises awaits her.

Jesus said to her, "Mary!"

She turned and spoke to him in Hebrew, "Rabbouni!" (meaning Teacher). Mary recognizes Jesus! He's Alive!

Jesus who was dead, is risen. Death could not hold him. It is the dawning of a new day! A new creation! A new beginning! Christ is alive! They would soon come to realize that the liberation was from the sin, and his love was for all people and for all of creation. It really was a new beginning, a new way of living, and a new way of being. For them! For us! For all!

THANKS BE TO GOD!

Sisters and Brothers, this Easter, we will not be worshipping with communities of faith. We will be socially separated. Still, we have every reason to rejoice. Christ is risen! Wherever you are this coming Sunday, lift up your voice and sing with joy. We serve a risen Savior!

I close with words to the hymn, “Joy Dawned Again on Easter Day.” May it also be a prayer from our hearts.

**With Joy and Gladness,
Abbot Julian**

“Joy Dawned Again on Easter Day”

**Joy dawned again on Easter Day,
the sun shone out with bright array;
For when the Apostles hid in fear,
the Risen Christ to them appeared.**

**O Jesus, Savior, Gentle One,
come take our hearts to be your own,
That we may give you all our days
the willing tribute of our praise.**

**O Sovereign One, with us abide
in this our joyful Eastertide;
From every weapon death can wield,
your own redeemed forever shield.**

It is #241 in the New Century Hymnal, with no copyright restrictions. It was first written in Latin around the 5th century. It was translated by John Mason Neale in 1851. The tune is PUER NOBIS NASCITUR.